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Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act Review

I wish to comment on three aspects of the GBRMP Act Review.

1. The **overall performance** of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) since it's inception.
2. The issue of **public consultation mechanisms**, particularly with respect to the implementation of the Representative Areas Program (RAP).
3. The **appropriateness of current arrangements** of GBRMPA as a Statutory Authority, and any **adjustment to the function of the Authority**.

1. Performance of GBRMPA.

An overwhelming display of public opinion in favour of protecting the GBR from limestone mining and oil exploration in the 1960's and 1970's lead to the passing of the GBR Marine Park Act (1975) by the Fraser government. I believe that public opinion was again strongly in favour of further protection of the GBR during the recent Representative Areas Program (RAP) re-zoning of the GBRMPA on July 1, 2004. In my opinion, a largely silent majority of Australians wanted RAP. An AEC survey of Australians in March 2003 found that 93.6 per cent of respondents (including over 90 per cent of coastal Queenslanders) wanted greater protection for the Marine Park. The Act implementing the RAP received support from all major and most minor political parties in both houses of parliament. We are fortunate to have a natural wonder like the GBR off our coastline. However, the GBR we have today is also a product of the demand from the Australian public for world class management. The GBRMPA has fulfilled this demand from the public so well, that it is regarded worldwide as the benchmark for marine park management. GBRMPA is recognised globally as the outstanding example of "world's best practice".

Clearly, public demand for adequate protection and management of the GBR is a major political driver. However, economic and social factors provide further metrics of how effective management of the GBR has been, and will be, in enhancing the national good. Tourism is a multi-billion dollar industry that dwarfs all others in the GBRMP in terms of income and employment. The future prospects of expansion of tourist income from the GBRMP are excellent, provided that we take responsibility for the effective protection and management of the GBR. The GBR is not only an Australian, but also a world icon. The GBR has the potential to be the world's leading tourist attraction, particularly as other coral reef systems degrade due to inadequate management and protection over the coming decades. The reef line fisheries on the GBR, which I have researched for the past 15 years, also have the potential to rise in value substantially over coming decades. The significance of good fisheries management by QDPIF, and protection from harvest of a good proportion of spawning reef fish by the GBRMPA's RAP, will likely make the GBR reef line fishery one of Australia's most sustainable and valuable fisheries. The long-term economic

and social benefits of good management of the GBR by the GBRMPA are substantial. The GBRMPA has managed the GBR with great foresight and success. At a time of global climate change, and at a time when coral reef systems in other parts of the world are showing signs of collapse, Australia will need an efficient and effective regional agency developing and implementing management policy on the GBR.

2. Public consultation mechanisms, particularly with respect to the implementation of the Representative Areas Program (RAP).

I have carried out research on marine reserves (no-take zones) on coral reefs for the past 22 years. This includes studies of GBR no-take zoning since 1990. I have led a small research group at James Cook University examining the effectiveness of the no-take zoning on inshore coral reefs of the GBRMP since 1998. We were one group to demonstrate clearly that the GBRMP zoning (set up in 1987 off Townsville) was effective in maintaining abundance of fish targeted by hook and line fisheries on the GBR. Thus, we had direct experience with the public consultation process. We made written submissions at both phases of public consultation, and attended public meetings on RAP implementation. From my experience with implementation of other marine parks in other places in the world, I would suggest that the public consultation mechanisms used by the GBRMPA during the RAP process were very good. GBRMPA had two rounds of public consultation, received tens of thousands of public submissions, involved 11 Local Marine Advisory committees along the Queensland coast, and had public meetings in most North Queensland coastal centres. My understanding is that GBRMPA achieved a workable balance between scientific, social and economic factors in the final version of the RAP zoning. No one should be surprised that the final decision on RAP implementation did not gain 100% support. But on balance, the result was likely the best for the long-term sustainable use and management of the GBR

3. The appropriateness of current arrangements of GBRMPA as a Statutory Authority, and any adjustment to the function of the Authority.

GBRMPA has functioned as a Statutory Authority with remarkable success since its inception, developing an outstanding national and international reputation. To subsume it into a large, centralised government department, and reduce it to a role of implementing, as opposed to developing, policy would be retrograde, and out of step with trends elsewhere in the world. The success of GBRMPA for the past 30 years has been that it has acted as a regional Statutory Authority, based in Townsville, central GBR. It is obviously located close to all major centres of population that use the GBR. It established 11 Local Marine Advisory committees along the Queensland coast almost a decade ago. It is located in the same city as the major reef research providers (AIMS, JCU, CRC-Reef). In recent years it has developed a strong policy of community-engagement and encouragement of stewardship of the GBRMP by local communities. To this end, it is in the process of further decentralisation (from Townsville) by establishing 4 new GBRMPA Offices in regional cities along the North Queensland coast. To reverse this trend of engaging local and regional communities in the development of policy, by taking policy decision making thousands of kilometres away to Canberra, will likely reduce the effectiveness of management of the GBR.

Two examples from overseas support the suggestion that centralisation of policy development is out of step with international trends. For the past 22 years, I have carried out research supporting the implementation of a large no-take marine reserve network on coral reefs of the southern Philippines. My research with my Philippine colleague, Dr. Angel Alcala, helped change the way the marine resources

of the Philippines (population 85 million) are now managed. Our research demonstrated the success of involving local communities in the implementation of no-take reserves, and had considerable influence in the passing of two pieces of national legislation (Local Government Code, 1991; Fisheries Code, 1998). This legislation devolved part of the decision making process down to local government level. Local municipalities now co-manage (with the National government) marine resources to 15 km off the Philippine coast. The move to devolve decision making down from a centralised government department to a co-management system that involves the people who depend upon the marine resources has been critical to the success of the program. A similar trend is occurring in Canada. The Canadian response to the largest and most spectacular fisheries management failures in history (the collapse of their east-coast cod stocks in 1992), has been to devolve some of the decision making process from a central government department in Ottawa, to involving regional fishing communities in decision making. The role of a Statutory Authority to simply implement policy may make sense in small country, where centralised government can "stay in touch". In large countries like Australia and Canada, regional decision making makes sense.

In summary, the performance of GBRMPA over the past 30 years has been exceptionally good, it's public consultation mechanisms on balance have worked, and I see little justification for any adjustment to the function, or current Statutory Authority arrangements, of GBRMPA.

Yours Sincerely,

Associate Professor Garry Russ,
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Garry Russ". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'G'.